

# Up to 60% of Direct Traffic Is Actually Search



**BRIGHTEDGE**  
CASE STUDY

## THE PROBLEM

Understanding what traffic came from what channel is easier in digital marketing than it ever was in offline marketing. Digital marketers make rational decisions on the success and failure of campaigns and what to do with the budget based on reliable information from their web analytics tools. But what if the reporting in two of the largest online channels is less reliable than everyone thought? What if 60% of direct traffic, which is usually attributed to PR, social, offline and brand, is actually traffic from search engines with the domain referrer stripped off? That would mean that search's contribution would be undercounted.

## THE SOLUTION

Gene McKenna, Director of Search at Groupon, set out to answer this question and was willing to take drastic action. His hypothesis was this: If referrers are 100% accurate for direct traffic, then turning off the search traffic by setting a deindexing command for the whole site would have no impact on direct traffic.

## THE RESULTS

What McKenna found was that direct traffic on interior pages dipped in a very correlated way with the search engine traffic dip. If direct and search traffic were equal, for every 10 search visitors that were lost after deindexing, 6 direct visitors were lost also. He found that the effect was more pronounced on interior pages with longer urls and up to 75% of some IE browser search traffic was reported as direct. That means that surveys like BrightEdge's Channel Performance white paper that found 51% of visitors coming from search (excluding direct as a channel) is still understating the proportion that comes from search engines. Both research studies confirm the significant opportunity most companies have to increase the business value they derive from search traffic. The decreased reliability of query and referrer information makes having an SEO platform more important than ever.



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The referrer is a weak link in SEO reporting.”

